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TAPOL REPORT

Reactions in Jakarta to Bishop Belo's UN letter

In Tempo, 27 May 1989:

Bishop Belo turned the clock back when he sent a letter to the UN Secretary General asking him to intervene over the decolonisation of East Timor.... Understandable, this letter has not been given much of a welcome on the international arena. Said Foreign Minister Alatas: "Indonesia has succeeded in convincing the international community that the decolonisation process has been resolved according to the wishes of the people". He mentioned for example that the meeting of Non-Bloc ministers in Harare last week made no mention of East Timor in its final statement. There was no sign that any Non-Bloc country tried to raise ET at the meeting either....

There have been various reactions, all of them regretting the Bishop's action. Said F.X. Lopez da Cruz, former UDT leader: "The self-determination issue has long ago been settled by law. The question no longer exists in ET." Clementino dos Reis Amaral, former regent in Portuguese days, said that Belo does not voice the opinion of the people. "I am convinced that, if asked, it is not possible that Bishop Belo's voice is in accord with the voice of the 650,000 East Timorese." He said the motivation of the Bishop should be investigated. For instance, has he become an Indonesian citizen? "Many pastors in East Timor still have foreign citizenship."

Armed forced commander-in-chief believes the Bishop's action is not in accord with his position and function as a religious leader. "State affairs are affairs for the state," said General Try Sutrisno, "not affairs for the church or other religious institutions." He said the Bishop would be warned about the way that state affairs are regulated in Indonesia.

Said Governor Carrascalao: "The question of East Timor has been resolved. There have been two general elections in East Timor, in 1982 and 1987." In 1987, more that 360,000 inhabitants of East Timor voted, ie more than 90% of the population, and Golkar won 94% of the votes. Governor Carrascalao has checked up with a number of pastors in ET. It turns out they know nothing about the Bishop's letter. But Belo himself, who has several times been contacted stands by his opinion that the settlement of the ET question must be by a referendum. Carrascalao therefore concludes that the step he took is his own personal responsibility.

Carrascalao thinks this is because Belo is still quite young and when the process of integration occurred, the 41-year old priest was not in East Timor. He is the first native East Timorese to become the Pope's representative in East Timor. In 1985, he was known to have an Indonesian passport. At the time of the disturbances in 1975, Belo was studying in Lisbon, and went from there to Rome. He only returned to ET in 1981.

When contacted by phone by Tempo, the Bishop said he "had no other intentions" in his letter to the UN Sec-Gen. It is noteworthy that in his Pastoral letter of 15 April, the Bishop said that practical politics are not the business of pastors, bishops or the Pope. "Their task is to give correct moral guidance, not to take sides with a party."

TAPOL, the Indonesia human rights campaign.
111 Northwood Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey CR4 8HW, Telephone and Fax 01 771 2904